

Consequences
Genesis 29
February 27, 2000
Dr. Jerry Nelson

Who is it that tells the story of the little boy who cried “wolf” too many times?

The story is of a little boy who often called out that he was in danger from an attacking wolf and needed help when he wasn't.

He lied about it so many times that no one believed him when he truly was in danger.

And on that occasion, the wolf ate him.

He lied so many times that it was assumed that he was a liar.
He sowed lies and reaped disbelief.

There is a maxim as old as history that says, “A man reaps what he sows”.

In fact, as gravity is to nature, so this law is to life – “You reap what you sow.”

You sow a pumpkin seed and you reap a pumpkin.
You sow deceit and you reap deceit.

We see it happen around us all the time.

A child disrespects others until nobody will have anything to do with him.

A person who disregards his body until he is weak and sick.

A man who ignores his family until he has no family.
You reap what you sow.

God has ordered his world with that law.

Not a very happy thought for a Sunday morning, is it?

We like the law applied to others, but we fear when it is applied to us.
We wish God and others would disregard our failings, our indiscretions, our wrongs against him and others.

When justice isn't applied to us we are delighted but when it's not applied to others we wonder what kind of God allows such wrongs to go unpunished.

But God doesn't change his character because we don't like something.

God is just and justice will be done.

The Bible repeatedly makes it clear that justice will be served – even if it is a long time from now.

“Payday someday” is another expression of the same law.

**But God also brings another truth to bear on life.
He brings the truth of mercy and grace.**

Mercy, as most of you know, is not being treated as we deserve to be treated.

Grace is being treated in a way we don't deserve to be treated.

Mercy and grace interrupt the law of reaping what you sow.

Or do they?

It is that which I wish to explore with you today.

For us who are Christians, for us who have been adopted into God's forever family, does the law of reaping what you sow still apply?

And if so, how?

The OT incident in which this is played out is a very entertaining and yet very thought-provoking one.

Follow along in your Bible as I read it.
Genesis 29:1-30

What a story!

Boy meets girl – love at first sight.

Long-lost relatives reunited.

Love so great that a man agrees to work for seven years to be able to marry his sweetheart.

The grossest kind of swindle when the father-in-law gives him the wrong girl.

The strength of love that compels the man to work another seven years to get the right girl.

Why does Moses tell this story?

Is it a love story?

It is, but I'm convinced that is not the point of the story.

Is it a character study of the cheating Laban?

It is, but I'm convinced Laban is not the central figure in the story.

The central character is Jacob and the story illustrates the law of life that we reap what we sow.

And I want you to watch how God applies that law with mercy and grace.

I asked a minute ago, "Does the law of reaping what you sow apply to Christians who have been forgiven?" The answer is yes, but it is tempered by God's mercy and grace.

Before we go on to see how this plays out in Jacob's life, I want to speak to a couple of things that undoubtedly came to your mind as you read the story.

Things that I hope you can set aside to learn why the story was really written.

The most glaring problem that is often cited in this story is how Jacob could have spent his wedding night with the wrong woman and not have known it.

It is one of the funniest (if it wasn't the saddest) lines in the story.

It says, "When morning came, there was Leah!"

Jacob woke up the next morning and surprise, surprise, it wasn't his much-loved and long-worked-for Rachel in the bed with him but her older sister Leah.

We can't help but ask ourselves how Jacob couldn't have known.

Well as entertaining as it would be to play with the idea, the culture probably answers the question.

From what we learned from Rebekah earlier in Genesis, Leah was probably veiled.

From this text we learn that it was nighttime when Jacob and Leah finally went to bed.

And from this text we learn that it was after a day of feasting which probably meant drinking.

Leah was veiled until bedtime, it was dark and Jacob was very possibly slightly inebriated.

Where was Rachel during all of this?

How did Laban and Leah keep her from being seen by Jacob?

Did the mother go along with this plan?

We don't know the answers to all the questions, but regardless of how it happened, it happened.

Now with those entertaining but largely irrelevant questions out of the way, we can go back to the real issue of this incident.

The story illustrates the law of life that we reap what we sow.

And how God applies that law with mercy and grace.

If you allow yourself to enter into the story sufficiently to empathize with Jacob you realize how unfair this whole situation was.

Jacob's love for Rachel is clearly emphasized in the story.

He embraced Rachel when he first met her. 29:11

We are told she was lovely in form and beautiful. 29:17

We are told that Jacob was in love with Rachel. 29:18

We are told that the seven years he worked to get her were like only a few days to him because of his love for her. 29:20

And we are told that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah 29:30

All of that coupled with the fact that he worked for 14 years to have the right to have her as his wife, certainly convinces us that Jacob was smitten with this woman and continued to be.

It is that which makes what happens next so despicable.

Why would God allow this to happen to Jacob?

Why would God allow Laban to do this sinister and unfair thing?

Not only did Jacob work for seven years and not get his beloved, but he had to work another seven years to finally get her.

How could God let this happen?

And even then, as we learn later in chapter 30, Laban doesn't let Jacob leave – but makes him work another six years. (30:25ff)

Why does God allow this?

I want you to see that Moses, the author, is demonstrating that Jacob is reaping what he sowed.

For all of our empathy for Jacob, Moses doesn't share it.

There is no commentary here that suggests Jacob is being treated unjustly.

To the contrary, there is strong evidence that Jacob is getting some of what he deserved.

Let me tell you why I say that.

First of all, anyone who has read the earlier account of Isaac, Jacob's father, finding a wife, will note the great similarities between Jacob's story and Isaac's.

Abraham's servant went to the same country to get a wife for Isaac, Jacob's father.

The servant went to a well and there he met Rebekah who became Isaac's wife.

It may have been the very same well.

In both the earlier incident and Jacob's, something unusual or supernatural accompanied the incident.

For Abraham's servant and Rebekah it was her asking exactly the right questions and doing the right things exactly as the servant had prayed.

For Jacob and Rachel it was Jacob's superhuman moving of the stone covering the well.

In both cases the girl runs home to tell her family – the same family. And in both cases Laban hurried out to meet the visitor – Abraham's servant years earlier and Jacob this time.

We are clearly meant to compare the two stories.

So while Jacob's father, Isaac, is not specifically mentioned in this story, he is thought of all through it.

Secondly, I want you to notice in what way Jacob is treated so unfairly in this story.

He is deceived.

Have you heard about deceit before?

Yes, that is exactly how Jacob is described in chapter 27.

27:35-36 Isaac said to Esau, "your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing!" Esau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob. He has deceived me these two times: he took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing."

You reap what you sow!

Thirdly, I want you to see who is serving whom.

It was specifically said of Jacob that his relatives would serve him but when we get to chapter 29 and following we find it is Jacob of whom it is said specifically that he is serving Laban.

Fourthly, I want you to notice the text makes much of the fact that it is the father and the firstborn who deceive Jacob.

Just as Jacob had deceived his firstborn brother, Esau, and father, Isaac, so here it is the firstborn, Leah, and the father, Laban, who are now deceiving him.

What is Moses showing us?

The deceiver is deceived!

You reap what you sow.

Is that taught elsewhere in the Bible? Yes, it is!

Galatians 6:7-8

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Job 4:8 Those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it.”

Hosea 10:13 But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil,

Proverbs 22:8 He who sows wickedness reaps trouble,

Romans 13:4-5

“For he (the governing authority) is God's servant to do you good. **But if you do wrong, be afraid**, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities...”

What law is repeated throughout those and many other verses and incidents in the Bible?

We reap what we sow!

Again I say, most of us would like to think that wasn't so but throughout the entire Bible it is repeated over and over again.

Then someone wisely raises an objection to this law!

Wait a minute, didn't Jesus die to pay the consequences for our sin?

Isn't that the whole point of forgiveness – that we don't have to pay?

Isn't that what mercy and grace are all about?

And the answer is “yes and no”.

Let me explain.

Yes, it is true that in Christ we are forgiven for our sins.

We will not pay the ultimate consequence of our sins which is eternal separation from God.

In God's mercy he has removed that consequence from us who are trusting in Christ, because Christ has borne that consequence for us when he died on the cross.

But nowhere in Scripture is it suggested that all the consequences for our sin are automatically removed when we repent and believe.

To the contrary, there are too many examples of how some consequences follow sin even after forgiveness. We may not reap all we deserve by what we have sown but we reap nonetheless.

David sinned against God, against Bathsheba and her husband when he committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Following that adultery and David's murder of Bathsheba's husband, Nathan the prophet came to David and indicted him.

David realized his sin and repented fully for what he had done.

In Psalm 51 we have we believe the confession David makes and in Psalm 32 we have the expression of David's joy over sins forgiven.

Psalm 51:1-2

Have mercy on me O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

Psalm 32:1-2

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him..."

But according to 2 Samuel 12 when did David's son, born out of the adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, die?

Was it before he confessed his sin and repented before the Lord or after?

It was after.

David still, in part, reaped what he had sown.

The law of reaping what we sow is not contradicted by grace. It is mitigated, it is softened, but it is not contradicted.

In chapter 28 we learned about the time Jacob first met God in a personal and powerful way and received the reiteration of the great promises of God to him and his descendants?

Did Jacob reap the consequences of what he had sown earlier in his life before or after that?

It was after.

Jacob still, in part, reaped what he had sown.

Again I read Galatians 6:7-8 written to God's people, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Those verses were written to Christians and they are no less true today than when they were written.

I don't have the time to defend this next statement but I think if you study it you will see that the verse is talking just as much about life here and now as it is life after death.

One author described it this way: "Every time we allow our mind to harbor a grudge, nurse a grievance, entertain an impure fantasy, wallow in self-pity, we are sowing to the flesh. Every time we linger in bad company, whose insidious influence we know we cannot resist, every time we lie in bed when we ought to be up and praying, every time we read (or watch) pornographic literature, every time we take a risk that strains our self-control, we are sowing, sowing, sowing, to the flesh." (John RW Stott in *The Message of Galatians* p 170)

And the Bible says whatever we sow we reap.

If that is all this story of Jacob demonstrated it would be a far sadder story than it already is.

And the message to us would be bleak indeed.

But it is not all this story of Jacob demonstrates.

It demonstrates that God truly mitigates the law of sowing and reaping and he does it by his grace.

In the midst of suffering the consequences for his sin, Jacob experiences three gracious actions of God.

First of all Jacob does not get what he deserves.

The consequences are truly softened.

Secondly, it is obvious that God was blessing Jacob even while Jacob is bearing the consequences.

Jacob finds his extended family, he meets and falls in love with Rachel, later we learn that he prospers greatly, and he has the very family that God had promised him.

God had said that He would be with Jacob and prosper him and God does it.

The consequences Jacob suffers don't stop the grace of God.

But there is more.

The consequences that Jacob suffers are no longer punitive, they are no longer a punishment for sin, they are instead, a discipline, a training for godliness.

The consequences of sin for a believer are turned by God into the potential for spiritual growth.

God allows those consequences to still come because of our sin but he takes them and uses them for our good.

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

God used the consequences of Jacob's sin to change Jacob. Jacob leaves Haran, 20 years later, a different man than when he came.

He came new in faith and untested, he left changed, not perfect, but changed by God's gracious use of sin's consequences to shape him.

One of the titles I thought of giving this text was "The Salvation of Sin".

By it I meant that God takes even the consequences of our sin and turns them for our good.

He takes something evil and by his grace uses it for good.

By God's grace three things are happening in our lives at all times:

1. We are suffering fewer consequences for our sins than we deserve.
2. God is blessing us as he promised in spite of our sin.
3. And God is using the consequences of our sin to forge a new us.

How do we respond?

First, we need to heed the warning illustrated by Jacob and taught throughout Scripture that we reap what we sow.

And we must remember that forgiveness doesn't contradict that law even though God graciously mitigates it greatly.

God's warnings to believers are real.

Sin brings painful and lasting consequences to our lives.

God does not delight in disciplining his children – but he loves us enough to do so.

But there is a better way – it is called obedience.

Secondly, we need to learn from the consequences we endure.

Let's not rebel against God when we reap what we've sown.

Instead like Jacob, let's humbly bow our heads and lives and obey God and be changed through the experience - as difficult as it may be.

Most illustrations of this truth are too personal to reveal.

But I will tell you of something that happened many years ago.

I was responsible for managing a large weekday preschool program with many employees.

One of those employees was a pain to work with.

When the next year's contracts were written, I told that cantankerous teacher that we didn't need her because we needed fewer teachers the next year.

The truth was that I hired another teacher in her place.

After I had done so, I was convicted of the lie I had told that woman.

I remember laboring with guilt for two days, trying to rationalize my behavior with the idea that she deserved to be fired and I had spared her that humiliation.

Finally, able to handle the guilt no longer, I went to the Lord and asked his forgiveness.

I know I was forgiven but I also had to go and ask the forgiveness of the woman I had lied to.

Painful as that was, I went.

I thought it was over.

It wasn't.

I not only had to rehire that woman, but others learned of what I had done and I had to stand before my boss and admit my lie and I had to live with the fact that my lie became common knowledge among my employees.

I reaped what I sowed.

But God used those consequences to teach me a powerful lesson.

God will graciously, though painfully, use the consequences of our sins to teach us.

Thirdly, we need to thank God that we are not paying the price we owe and thank him that he is using this consequence for our good.

The old law of reaping what you sow is still in operation in God's world.

And the new laws of mercy and grace are also operational.

Pray:

O God let us take sin seriously – realizing it affects us for years and even generations.

Help us to believe that we reap what we sow – that we may sow righteousness.

And thank you merciful and gracious God that you don't punish us as we deserve but you continue to bless us and even use the consequences of our sins to do us good.

India announcement

A week from Wednesday three of us pastors will be going again to India to teach Bible courses to the Indian students and pastors of the Evangelical Free Church of India.

Most, if not all of those Indian pastors are financially limited and our history has been to provide the money for their transportation, books and board and room while they are taking the courses.

It costs about \$50 per student to provide for them. Your help in sponsoring one or more of these students will be greatly appreciated.

There are brass buckets at the door to receive your sponsorship– if you are able to help please do so.

Also we strongly appeal to you to stop at the Missions' Display at the other end of the Welcome Center and pick up the name and prayer card for one of the Indian Pastors and pray for them during these next three weeks.